

Pilgrimage Through the Watchtower

Chapter 9: Life in Christ



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Chapter 9: Life in Christ

The following Sunday I attended church for the first time. I was terrified! All that I knew at that time about church was from what I had learned at the Kingdom Hall, that the churches were infested with demons, and that no true Christian would ever dare set foot in one. But all during my exodus from the Watchtower I had kept a Scripture verse in mind that had given me strength: "But for the cowardly...their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev 20:8)." As a matter of principle I had determined that as God opened doors before me, I would walk through them come what may.

I walked through the foyer of the Evangelical Free Church in Clinton Corners together with Brad and Leslie. We climbed the stairs to the balcony and were seated there. As the service began, the organist played some soft music, and I relaxed somewhat. Then, pastor Jon Heymann walked to the front of the platform and asked, "Is there anyone here visiting us for the first time? Would you please stand up and tell us your name and where you're from?" I stood up, a little hesitantly, and answered, "My name is Kevin Quick. I'm from Hyde Park." I heard gasps from the congregation around me and from down below. "It's very good to have you with us today, Kevin." I could tell that Jon was genuinely pleased to have me there that day, and after the service, several people introduced themselves to me and said that they had been praying for me.

I enjoyed the service, and I enjoyed meeting my new brothers and sisters afterwards. My initial fears melted away as I began to understand what true Christian fellowship was all about. Though I had just met them, I really *loved* these people! We were not joined together so much by the knowledge that we carried in our minds, as are Jehovah's Witnesses, but by the personal relationships that we each had in our hearts with Jesus. Like that night after my accepting Christ as Savior, when my heart spontaneously cried out, "Let God be praised!", so now as I fellowshipped with these born again Christians, my heart was saying as it were, "Amen! Amen! You love Jesus too? Amen!" I knew that I was one of them, and I loved them! We were all one in Christ (Rom 12:5).

After several months of fellowship at the Evangelical Free Church, I was baptized by pastor Jon "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19)."

Life as a Christian and life as a Jehovah's Witness are as different as day and night. The foundation of my new life, my personal relationship with Christ, is a glorious, immovable foundation (Matt 7:24,25). My righteousness is no longer my own; I indeed have no righteousness in myself. But positionally I am, as are all true Christians, "in Christ," inseparably joined to Him forever. His impeccable righteousness has been imputed to me, not by works that I have done, but by the work that He has done for me, which righteousness I have simply received by faith (Eph 2:8-10). And experientially, I can testify that God is at work in me, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). As I walk with Him day by day, I experience His sanctifying work in me, from the inside out. I am enabled at all times by the Holy Spirit who indwells me to live a life that is pleasing to my heavenly Father. Many of the old, fleshly desires that I used to be plagued with both before and after becoming a Jehovah's Witness were entirely taken away when I accepted Christ. And of those that still remain, not one of them is any match for the indwelling Holy Spirit as I yield my life to Him.

Since coming to Christ, the Bible is a brand new book for me. Passages that were once dark and mysterious are now glorious, full of light and life. Oh, how joyous to experience the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:24, 1 John 2:27)! I am sometimes moved to tears of joy and thanksgiving when I read of what my Savior has done, how He loves me, and how He is so patiently preparing us to spend eternity with Him.

Bible study has turned from obligatory tedium to one of life's most wonderful adventures. Bible study, whether it be at church, Sunday school, small group gatherings, or alone at home, has proven to be a rich source of spiritual nourishment for me. Unlike Watchtower indoctrination, true Christian studies are boundless. Scholarly works on nearly every subject imaginable are available for objective study. Studies in Christian theology and church history are ready and waiting for the seeker. Christian bookstores are packed full of reference Bibles, books, and tapes to instruct the Christian. Before entering a Christian bookstore, I always make it a point to pray to my Father that He might direct me to the materials in the store that I would benefit from most. I've yet to be disappointed!

Weekly Church services, so difficult for me that first time, have proven to be a wonderful source of Christian fellowship and edification. My fellowship with other Christians is enjoyed not on the basis of an enforced organizational unity,

but on genuine love and concern for one another. Communion services are especially beautiful and touching for me, having been denied this special fellowship with Christ for many years. Regarding doctrinal unity, I have found agreement on the essential doctrines of the Christian faith among all of the dozens of evangelical ("born again") churches that I have visited over the past several years, together with charitable room for differences of opinion on relatively inconsequential matters. I've found the Watchtower's incessant accusation of profound doctrinal disunity among evangelical churches to be wholly unfounded.

Worship of God is another glorious aspect of Christian life that I was entirely unacquainted with as a Jehovah's Witness. As Witnesses, we *never* worshiped God. We talked a lot about "Jehovah's pure worship," we had meetings, we sang songs, but we never worshiped Jehovah. Now, at Christian meetings, in personal prayer, indeed at all times, I've found worship to be a most natural and enjoyable aspect of my new life. From the first "Let God be praised!" that flowed spontaneously from my heart on the night that I accepted Christ, until this very day, unfeigned worship is the unceasing expression of my new heart toward Him.

Serving God is no longer the tedious chore that it was as a Jehovah's Witness. Rather than obligation, I am motivated now by love; love for God and love for people. As I yield to Him, as His love is shed abroad in my heart, I feel something of the compassion that God has for our lost world; that same love that impelled Jesus to leave His glorious place in heaven to come to earth and die for us. Likewise, I now serve God not because I *have* to, but because I *want* to. And as you might expect, having spent a number of years with Jehovah's Witnesses, I especially have a tender place in my heart for them. Though my efforts to reach out to my former brethren with the love of Christ are often very stressful and emotionally painful for me, still I care for them and do what I can. A few examples will illustrate how I've attempted to reach out to them and how they've responded.

A few weeks after my disassociation from the Organization, as I returned home from church one Sunday afternoon, a group of "Farm brothers" was walking down our street, out in "field service." After a silent prayer to my Father, I walked down the driveway and out to the street, Bible in hand, and proceeded to witness to them. As I spoke to them about Jesus, they acted as though I was not there; they didn't even acknowledge my presence! It was like witnessing to a stone wall! Still, I was able to at least demonstrate that I had no fear of them, that I indeed loved Jehovah God and His Son Jesus more than ever, and that I really cared about them. "Give

Jesus a chance in your life," I said to them finally as we neared the Kingdom Hall at the end of our street. Then I turned back and walked home.

Approximately six months later, again after returning home from church one afternoon, I noticed that the circuit overseer's travel trailer was parked behind the Kingdom Hall. Wishing to demonstrate to my former brethren that I had valid reasons for taking the course that I had, and that I was not "like a wolf, endeavoring to devour Jehovah's weakest sheep in the congregation" as the Society had charged that the "apostates" were accustomed to do, I drove down to the Kingdom Hall. As I pulled into the parking lot, Bob, one of the congregation elders, spotted me and dashed into the Hall. After a prayer, I walked into the Kingdom Hall, a copy of my study in hand. The elders were standing in a tight circle at the back of the hall, talking with the circuit overseer. As I approached, their eyes became fixed on me. "I'd like to talk with the circuit overseer," I said. The circuit overseer spoke up, "What about?" "I assume that you know who I am," I said. "I noticed your trailer out back and thought that I ought to come and talk to you, so you might know exactly who I am, what I've come to believe, and why I'm doing the things that I'm doing (I had recently begun a recorded message telephone ministry in the area in an effort to reach out to Jehovah's Witnesses)." "I once was where you are," the circuit overseer answered coldly. I offered him the copy of my study that I'd brought for him, but he wouldn't take it. Refusing any further dialogue with me, the elders ushered me out the door.

On a business trip to Colorado, I spent a day in Colorado Springs, and attempted to witness to my friends in Manitou Springs, just a couple of miles away.

I first went to Rex's piano shop. Rex was an elder in the Foothills congregation whose company I had enjoyed very much. I'd often stop in and visit with him at his shop, and we both delighted in my testing out his pianos once or twice a week. This particular day Rex was not in. Rex's helper, Tracy, a close friend of mine for many years, was on the phone. Tracy saw me, and at first made no acknowledgement of my presence. When he hung up the phone, however, he said, "Kevin, I don't want to hear anything that you have to say. You know what you've done, having left Jehovah and his organization, and I don't want to have anything to do with you. Please leave." I tried to defend myself, "Tracy, I have not left Jehovah. I thought I could at least talk to you for a minute..." He cut me off, "If you don't leave immediately, I'm going to have to call someone to get you out of here." So I left the shop, amazed at how effective the Society's smear tactics are in destroying even the closest of friendships.

I then drove to Tony and Karla's apartment. Tony and Karla were also very close friends with whom I had gone on many skiing trips, etc. We had shared many, many intimate times together. I knocked, and Karla came to the door. She was, understandably, very surprised to see me there with a Bible in my hand. "Is Tony here?" I asked. "No, he's not," she answered. "Well," I said, "I guess you could say that I'm out in field service today, and I was hoping that I could talk with you and Tony about the Bible." "I'm afraid we're not interested," she said. She closed the door.

I went to Dean's house and knocked on the door. The screen door was closed, but the main door was open. Looking though the screen, Dean's wife Jean noticed that it was me, and said, "I can't talk to you." "I know that, Jean," I said, "but you and I both know that if it was up to us, you wouldn't be treating me like this. I have something that I'd like to give to you and Dean..." As Jean came toward the door, she said, "I think I'd better just..." and she closed the door in my face. Before leaving, I put the copy of my study that I had brought for them into the mailbox next to the door.

Back in Hyde Park, I had another opportunity to witness to Larry, the elder with whom I had studied for several years. His wife Dotti, the "pioneer," had been visiting Mary, a close friend of my younger sister Cheryl. When Mary mentioned to Dotti that her friend's brother (me) had left the Witnesses, and thereafter her other brother (Steve) would no longer speak to him, Dotti answered that it was *my* choice to leave "Jehovah's people," not theirs. She gave Mary the impression that I no longer wanted to have anything to do with my friends, Jehovah's Witnesses, and that therefore my ostracism from Steve was by my own choice.

About a week later, again on my way home from church, I saw Larry walking out of the Kingdom Hall toward his car. After a quick prayer, I drove into the Kingdom Hall parking lot, got out of my car, and approached Larry as he was about to get into his car. "Larry," I said, "I need to talk to you about something. Apparently word is being spread around by members of this congregation that I no longer want to have anything to do with my friends, Jehovah's Witnesses. That simply is not true. If you choose not to have anything to do with me, that's entirely *your* decision, not mine. I wish you would make this clear to the congregation." "Kevin," Larry said, his face twitching nervously, "You decided to leave Jehovah's organization. It was *your* decision. Nobody forced you to do it. You knew what the bylaws of this organization are; you knew what the consequences would be." "Yes, Larry," I answered, "but that's not the issue. Yes, I chose to leave this organization, but no, it was not and is not my desire

to have nothing to do with Jehovah's Witnesses. Now that I've become a Christian, I love Jehovah's Witnesses more than ever!" Still, Larry seemed incapable of separating the two issues. "No, Kevin, it was *your* decision." Anger was rising in his voice as he continued, "You are spreading what we consider to be unclean teachings. It was *your* choice to have nothing to do with Jehovah's people." "Larry," I said as compassionately as I could, "you're an intelligent person. In a very short time I could prove to you beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Watchtower Society is *not* God's organization. It would do not only you but all of Jehovah's Witnesses well to recognize who Jesus is, and to come to Him for salvation..." Shaking almost uncontrollably now, Larry said, "Kevin, you've made your decision, and that's that!" He got into his car and closed the door.

I've been unable to witness to my brother Steve [still true as of February 1998--KQ]. I do see him from time to time. I always say "hi" and try to let him know that I care about him, and that I'd love to talk with him, but he simply turns away coldly and won't have anything to do with me. Brad, however, since he was never a Witness, can and does share with Steve from time to time. And of course, we're both praying for him.

So although seeing and thinking about my Jehovah's Witness friends and my brother Steve is often very painful, I'm not as distressed by it as I could be. I've come to realize that as a Christian I should expect to be persecuted for the cross of Christ (Gal 6:12). And with God's continual enablement through the Holy Spirit, I can indeed obey Jesus' admonition to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt 5:44)." And from the bottom of my heart I can honestly say together with my Lord, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)."

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